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Wartime Role of the NIS

Our experience in this war has effectively proved that if the United States is to have the necessary basic intelligence available for early planning of possible operations, it is essential that such intelligence be collected, collated, published, and distributed -- i.e., ready to use -- prior to the beginning of hostilities.

From a letter from the Commandant, Marine Corps, to the Chief of Naval Operations, 1945.

These words of an experienced commander succinctly express the primary mission of the National Intelligence Survey: to develop the basic intelligence required by the government in the event of another war. No one can predict the area of such a conflict. The only safeguard is full and timely intelligence on all foreign countries and areas of the world. That is the fundamental reason for the existence of the NIS program, which was initiated by direction of the National Security Council in 1948, based on the hard lessons we had learned during World War II.

Comprehensive basic intelligence is also urgently needed in this Cold War period as a basis for sound national intelligence estimates and strategic plans. To this end the NIS is produced in accordance with current priorities established by The Joint Chiefs of Staff.

But, in spite of the fact that the NIS is the largest intelligence coordination and production program of the government, there will always be intelligence gaps and deficiencies unfilled. The world is too large, the intelligence requirements too extensive, ever to wholly satisfy the planning and operational needs of modern war.

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However, by the beginning of hostilities we intend to have available a broad base of well-integrated intelligence, in contrast to the serious deficiencies extending through most of World War II. The essential elements of that intelligence will be published and available to all major high commands and planning staffs as well as the policy levels of government. Backstopping these published documents will be the extensive files of detailed information maintained by the more than forty government activities which contribute their specialized skills to the NIS program.

During the course of a future war the NIS will give priority to filling intelligence gaps and revising NIS on areas of military importance; to the production of such special NIS studies as may be required by the military situation; and to the development and integration of new basic intelligence requirements stemming from the impact of modern warfare.

In considering the role of the NIS program in time of war, there should not be forgotten its role as victory is forged. The military government requirements of the occupational forces will have urgent need for basic intelligence support; and, with the return of peace, we will be faced with the formidable task of revising and bringing up to date large segments of the NIS to reflect the world-wide changes wrought by the war.